A BETTER BALANCE:
NOVA SCOTIA'S FIRST GAMING STRATEGY

April 2005

NOVA SCOTIA

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On behalf of the Government of Nova Scotia, we are pleased to submit **A Better Balance: Nova Scotia's First Gaming Strategy.**

In Canada, Nova Scotia is leading the way, developing a comprehensive strategy that combines all elements of gaming and brings together all government agencies with such a responsibility. Implementing the actions outlined in this strategy will position Nova Scotia as one of the most progressive jurisdictions anywhere.

The most important motivation for this strategy is the positive impact it will have on gaming in Nova Scotia – and the related, positive impact for Nova Scotians. The strategy contributes to making Nova Scotia a great place to live, work, and raise a family. It stresses social responsibility, reduces our reliance on gaming revenue, and overall, strikes a better balance. Its aim is to provide people with choices, support, information, and confidence. It is truly a significant step in a positive direction, taking us out of the past and into a more balanced future.

The cornerstone of the strategy is treatment and prevention. Treatment is the only way to help those whose lives have been affected by problem gambling. Prevention is the best way to limit the number of problem gamblers we will have in the future. And prevention must be looked at in its broadest sense – it is anything that averts a problem. This would include not only education and awareness, but initiatives that make gaming less attractive to potential problem gamblers.

This strategy was developed through the hard work and input of many Nova Scotians, including stakeholders in communities around the province. This included problem gambling groups, treatment and prevention professionals, researchers, retailers, charities, and many others. We have worked to strike the right balance and find the best solutions based on available information.

Within government, the work of developing the strategy was an integrated effort. Leadership was provided by a steering committee comprised of senior officials from every government department and agency with a responsibility for gaming in the province. This included the departments of Environment and Labour, Finance, and Health, the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, the Office of Health Promotion, and the Treasury and Policy Board.

These individuals, supported by a team of senior staff, were responsible for taking the public input obtained during the fall of 2004 and turning it into concrete recommendations for change. The result is a comprehensive strategy, covering a new vision for gaming in the province, backed up by substantial initiatives that will create a more responsible gaming environment.

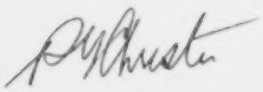
Government is committed to following through on this strategy, giving it the attention and resources it deserves. For example, we have committed $3 million to treatment and prevention in 2005-2006. Overall, developing the strategy is an important first step. Now, our focus turns to implementation, monitoring, and assessment to make sure that the desired impacts are achieved, and meaningful and beneficial change occurs.

While change will not happen overnight, we are committed to long-term progress. We are also committed to monitoring the impact of the initiatives and changes and altering our course where evidence indicates that we should.

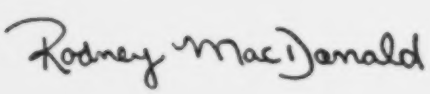
Today, we are clear that we need to focus our attention on treatment and prevention. To sum it up, the strategy will ensure that treatment will be there in the right place at the right time to support those most affected by problem gambling. Through this strategy, we will help those who need it most – with the goal of returning them to their families, their work and the lives they led before gambling took over.

We will also ensure that solid prevention initiatives are in place to realize a better future with fewer new cases of problem gambling. With these cornerstones in place, the strategy should bring success, and ultimately, that success will benefit all Nova Scotians.

Sincerely,



Peter G. Christie
Minister responsible for Part I of the
Gaming Control Act



Rodney J. MacDonald
Minister of Health Promotion

A Better Balance: Government's Commitment to Nova Scotians

For too long, our discussion of gaming has centred around words like "financial returns," "social responsibility," "treatment options," and "prevention." While this is very appropriate in many respects, it is important to remember why government is in the business of gaming in the first place. The bottom line is to benefit and protect Nova Scotians.

Nova Scotia has a history of initiating proactive programs to improve the gaming environment in the province. In many cases, we are seen as leaders in responsible gaming. Efforts have included Responsible Gaming Awareness Week, retailer training programs, the Problem Gambling Helpline, and a variety of awareness and education campaigns. We also have the lowest prevalence of problem gambling in the country. However, we believe that this is not enough. We want to see more action, more coordination, and better results.

As we move forward to implement this gaming strategy over the next five years, we believe it is important to state our commitment to the citizens of Nova Scotia.

To that end, government continues to make a commitment to:

- **Remember that gaming is about people – citizens who live in this province, pay taxes, and benefit from government services and programs; Nova Scotians who want to make the choice to play games of chance for fun and entertainment; Nova Scotians who develop a problem with gambling and the families who feel the impact; communities that participate in gaming to raise funds for worthy causes; people working in the industry; public servants implementing policies and programs; and young people who need to be educated about the risks associated with gambling**

- **Make practical decisions that balance the varied yet legitimate interests of all Nova Scotians**

- **Continue to listen to Nova Scotians and their opinions**

- **Make informed decisions based on the best evidence available and, if no evidence is available, make sure we pilot or test solutions and monitor and assess the impact, reacting appropriately to what we learn**

- **Help those who are most vulnerable and focus on returning them to their families, work, communities, and lives**

- **Focus on prevention to help keep gaming at a level that is fun and entertaining**

- **Make revenue a secondary priority**

- **Constantly monitor and adapt our strategy, and react accordingly**

Executive Summary

Nova Scotia is committed to significant, comprehensive change to achieve a responsible gaming environment that benefits Nova Scotians and their communities over the next five years. The strategy includes a number of targeted initiatives across various areas as outlined below.

Increased problem gambling treatment efforts

- Increase problem gambling treatment resources based on demonstrated needs of District Health Authorities
- Develop an early identification/intervention program for high-risk players
- Develop and implement a comprehensive treatment demonstration research project
- Establish a comprehensive problem gambling strategy
- Work with First Nations to develop and implement strategies to address problem gambling and addictions in Mi'kmaq communities
- Develop and implement a financial counselling services program

Enhanced, targeted prevention efforts

- Continue to implement and enhance responsible gaming programs and tools
- Launch a public awareness program based on social marketing principles
- Develop and implement targeted education programs (youth, seniors)
- Develop and implement a community-based prevention program
- Open an on-site resource centre at the casinos
- Commission a socio-economic study
- Pilot card-based player management tools at the casinos
- Commission another prevalence study

Decisive action on VLTs

- **Reduce accessibility to VLTs**
  - Remove 1,000 VLTs across all profit retail locations, with an initial 800 machines in 2005 and an additional 200 machines to be removed through attrition
  - Reduce VLT hours by eliminating the 12 midnight to close timeframe
- **Make product changes to VLTs**
  - Slow down play by removing the "Stop" Button feature on all VLTs
  - Reduce speed of games by 30 per cent
  - Pilot card-based player management tools for VLTs

Enhanced use of gaming to support our communities and our province

- Develop a gaming strategy for the charitable sector
- Continue discussions with First Nations about restructuring gaming arrangements to implement a more socially responsible gaming model on reserves

Increased accountability

- Review, evaluate and report on progress on an annual basis
- Review current law enforcement resources to meet our objective of ensuring legal, controlled gaming

We are committed to filling information gaps by doing the necessary research and evaluation to guide our decisions. With all of the current, best available information, we will advance toward our vision. We will continue to monitor, evaluate and measure the impacts of all of the changes we implement and respond to what we learn.

Enhanced treatment and prevention programs and significant changes to the VLT program are at the core of the plan. We will carefully monitor our efforts and make the necessary adjustments as we move forward. This plan represents short- to mid-term measures and objectives – working toward the pursuit of positive change for the long-term benefit of Nova Scotians.

Introduction

A Better Balance

A Better Balance: Nova Scotia's First Gaming Strategy is a five-year strategy designed to set a new course for gaming in the province. It is intended to be a comprehensive, cohesive, integrated strategy which will be the first step in building a better, more balanced gaming environment in Nova Scotia.

Specifically, it contains an overall vision for what gaming will look like in the year 2010. It offers a new mission for those involved in the industry, outlines the guiding principles and goals that provide a foundation for the new direction, and sets some specific outcomes to assess change.

The core elements of the strategy are treatment and prevention in all its forms. Within that context, the strategy details a wide range of initiatives, some large and some small, designed to improve the current state of gaming. And finally, it charts the next steps for executing the strategy – for ensuring it is put into practice in a timely, responsible, and open manner.

The overall theme for this new direction in gaming is finding a better balance. It is clear that the current equilibrium is out of sync with what Nova Scotians want and value. As gaming has grown in the province, there has been discussion about balancing the economic benefits of gaming with our responsibilities to society. That remains true. However, it is clear that social responsibility must be at the top of the list.

The government is only interested in one kind of gaming environment – a socially responsible one. We cannot separate the business and economics from the social aspects of gaming. They do not exist in separate silos. They must work hand in hand.

The overall intent of the strategy is to realize a real and material change in gaming – ultimately creating a more responsible gaming environment across Nova Scotia.

Why Develop a Gaming Strategy?

The rationale for developing a gaming strategy for Nova Scotia has many layers. The first reason is very basic: Nova Scotia has been actively involved in gaming for almost 30 years, without having a provincial strategy or policy. That is not to say that individual departments and agencies do not have strategic plans and policies that relate to gaming – in fact, they do. And in many instances, these groups consult and cooperate on specific initiatives. However, there is a need to have a provincial strategy to guide these various functions.

As noted above, there also exists a sense that we have not achieved the right balance when it comes to gaming in Nova Scotia. Along with the positive economic benefits of gaming, come adverse health and social issues – including problem gambling for some Nova Scotians. A solid strategy will help achieve a better balance and allow us to more effectively measure the economic benefits, the social benefits and the social costs. It will also allow us to monitor and measure our success in achieving that better balance.

Challenges to Be Addressed

- Concern about the video lottery program in terms of:
  - the level of revenue derived from problem gamblers, which is estimated to be about 50 per cent of the total VLT revenue
  - the lack of controls afforded by a decentralized distribution model without uniform standards of social responsibility, customer service and regulatory oversight (this model has 3,234 VLTs in approximately 470 liquor-licensed establishments and another 615 VLTs on First Nations reserves)
  - the concentration of VLT gambling which is 55 per cent of legal gambling (casinos, ticket and video lotteries, bingo, charitable lotteries)
  - the disproportionate percentage of gaming revenue derived from VLTs, which currently represents 70 per cent of the total payment to the Province from gaming (casinos, ticket and video lotteries)

- Declining revenues from certain forms of gaming (ticket lotteries, bingo, harness racing) due to game maturity and increased competition in the gaming sector and across the entertainment industry
- Opportunities to leverage technology that could advance responsible gaming and the entertainment value of gaming
- A lack of consistent, coordinated and integrated research to inform decision-making and to ensure that social responsibility is integrated into the design and delivery of gaming
- Insufficient resources to allow for a critical evaluation and assessment of current programs and services
- Unexplored potential for greater partnerships with non-commercial and non-government entities to design more effective models to use gaming to support local communities and charities through gaming proceeds
- A lack of public awareness about the economic benefits of gaming and a growing public misperception that government is driven by economic return in its decision-making and is prepared to increase gaming revenues at any cost

Overall, it is clear that the status quo is not working. It is not sustainable, desirable, or acceptable. There is a need for bold and material change in gaming in Nova Scotia.

Efforts in Other Jurisdictions

Other jurisdictions in Canada have taken some steps toward improving the state of their gaming environments. Here is a quick snapshot.

- In May 2004, Loto-Québec released a development plan for 2004-2007 titled *Assuring a Balance Between Business Mission and Social Responsibility.*
- In January 2005, Manitoba announced increased funding toward responsible gaming research and program development.
- In January 2005, Ontario announced a gaming strategy with an increased focus on social responsibility, and a commitment to ensuring competitiveness of the industry.
- In March 2005, Newfoundland and Labrador announced a 15 per cent reduction in VLTs over the next five years.

In moving forward to build a balanced gaming environment, we have considered these efforts.

Before jumping too far into the next steps, however, it is important to look back at the process that led to the drafting of this report.

Process

The Nova Scotia gaming strategy Initiative began in 2003-2004 in response to an identified need for a comprehensive, integrated, and long-term strategy to guide the future direction of gaming in the province.

In order to develop the strategy, a three-phased approach was established:

- Phase I – development of concepts and discussion paper (October 2003-July 2004)
- Phase II – public input and stakeholder meetings (August-November 2004)
- Phase III – additional input-gathering and gaming strategy development (December 2004-March 2005)

The result of Phase I was a preliminary vision for the future of the gaming environment in Nova Scotia and guiding principle concepts to provide a framework for decision-making.

The next step was Phase II, which involved taking the discussion to a broader audience, namely key stakeholders and the public. This resulted in the creation and release of a **discussion paper in August 2004.** The goal of the discussion paper was to stimulate discussion and gather valuable perspectives and insights from stakeholders and the general public.

Gathering input was an essential part of creating the strategy. Meetings were held with **156 external stakeholders, representing 37 organizations** in cities and towns across the province. This included individuals working in the addictions services field, community health board members, individuals working in problem gambling services, gaming operators, gaming retailers, gaming manufacturers, harness racing representatives, and social scientists. In addition, input was received from the general public who provided their views in writing.

Initially, a total of 11 weeks was designated for the public input phase, however, a significant number of stakeholders asked for additional time to meet and make submissions. As a result, the deadline was extended by an additional four weeks to November 30, 2004.

Overall, there was a great deal of interest in the discussion paper from across Nova Scotia. Over 2,340 copies of the discussion paper were distributed, and 148 written or e-mailed responses were received. This feedback was incorporated in the final strategy and recommendations.

The input received during Phase II was summarized by the facilitator of the Phase II process and that summary is appended to this strategy as **Appendix A.**

Generally, the input gathered from public and stakeholders confirmed the work conducted during Phase I and the conclusion that change is required. The policy objective, vision and guiding principle concepts developed in Phase I were validated with an overall interest in striking a better balance between social responsibility and the business aspects of gaming.

While divergent opinions and views were expressed by stakeholders with competing interests and perspectives, the following three main themes emerged:

- the need to change the VLT program
- the priority of social responsibility
- the need to offer more effective problem gambling treatment and prevention programs

An **interdepartmental steering committee** worked for several months to distill recommendations and directions and develop a comprehensive strategy document. The committee consisted of senior officials from the departments of Environment and Labour, Finance, and Health, the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, the Office of Health Promotion, and the Treasury and Policy Board.

That committee considered the public and stakeholder input from Phase II as well as other key information, including **empirical research and literature, a review of experiences from other jurisdictions, and a review and analysis of expert opinions.**

Vision

In 2010, at the end of the five-year strategic plan, **we envision** that Nova Scotia will have a responsible gaming environment that benefits Nova Scotians and their communities. Specifically:

- Gaming will continue to be strictly regulated and controlled by government, either through direct operation or licences.
- There will be an increase in regulatory and law enforcement resources to ensure that only legal gaming products are offered in the province.
- Nova Scotia will continue to have the lowest percentage of problem and at-risk gamblers in Canada.
- People who need help will have easy access to a wide variety of effective, tried and tested treatment programs and services.
- Nova Scotia will continue to be a leader when it comes to providing effective education, awareness, and prevention programs.
- Government will rely less on revenue from video lottery.
- There will be more focus on the entertainment and social aspects of gaming.
- Decisions will be based on doing what is best for Nova Scotians rather than increasing gaming revenues.

Mission

Government has many specific responsibilities related to gaming. These include legislation, regulation, enforcement, management, prevention, education and treatment, just to name a few. As mentioned earlier, many government departments, agencies and offices are involved. In the past, each has had its own mission, mandate, and priorities. All those involved in gaming must have a common understanding and direction – a common set of priorities that they live by. The following is government's mission for gaming.

> *The Province of Nova Scotia is involved in gaming for the purpose of protecting the public good and optimizing the benefits to Nova Scotians. This means providing effective regulation, generating socially responsible revenue, helping those who have problems, and focusing on prevention, treatment, and education. Government will ensure that all gaming-related agencies and departments work together toward this common goal.*

Strategic Goals

In order to arrive at its mission, government has identified the following five strategic goals to work toward over the next five years.

Address problem gambling more effectively

- Design and implement effective and tailored problem gambling treatment and prevention programs
- Direct additional resources to problem gambling treatment and prevention to ensure that programs are available and accessible

Encourage healthy behaviours and choices

- Inform and educate Nova Scotians, both players and the public, about responsible gaming and problem gambling
- Offer the right tools, information, and support to enable informed decision-making

Pursue the development and growth of responsible, entertaining gaming products and venues

- Significantly reduce the reliance on video lottery revenue and reduce the video lottery revenue coming from high-risk and problem gamblers
- Improve product design, promotion, delivery, and use
- Ensure that any new products meet specific standards for social responsibility
- Work with First Nations bands interested in reducing or eliminating gaming operations on reserves

Design models to more effectively use gaming to support communities

- Enable charitable and not-for-profit organizations to access gaming opportunities to support their good works
- Recognize that gaming can be a fun, entertaining way for adults to socialize

Enhance accountability and informed decision-making by government

- Build the research base
- Evaluate and monitor performance in the achievement of the stated objectives
- Improve communication to the public and ensure that Nova Scotians are well-informed on all aspects of how gaming is impacting their province

Guiding Principles

1. Protect and benefit Nova Scotians: Gaming will be offered in Nova Scotia by government and licensed organizations to ensure that the economic benefits of entertaining, reliable, controlled gaming products remain in the province for the betterment of Nova Scotians and that illegal, socially irresponsible gaming operations do not seek to fill the void.

2. Put social responsibility first: Gaming will be offer in a socially responsible way, meaning that there is a focus on education and awareness and a commitment to the responsible design, delivery, promotion, and use of products. The end goal is to reduce the incidence of high-risk and problem gambling in the province.

3. Make revenue a secondary priority: Growth in revenues will occur only if it is responsible growth, meaning that it is not generated from an increase in the overall prevalence of problem gamblers. New forms of gaming will be assessed and introduced only if they pass this test. This is consistent with ensuring the viability of gaming through effective and efficient management.

4. Help those who need it and prevent problems wherever possible: Government will ensure that the adverse health and social consequences of problem gambling are being addressed by providing and enhancing health promotion, prevention, early intervention, treatment, and research programs.

5. Extend the benefits to the people in communities: Partnerships will be forged with local communities, private and charitable organizations, and other stakeholders to explore opportunities for them to make the most of gaming's economic benefits in a socially responsible manner.

6. Make evidence-based decisions: Well-founded, objective analysis, research and experience from other jurisdictions will be the foundation for all decisions related to gaming – whether they are regarding operations, regulation, or the prevention and treatment of problem gambling.

7. Ensure integrity and security: Gaming will be strictly regulated to ensure controlled outcomes and the security and integrity of products and systems, and law enforcement will be empowered to carry out their essential role.

8. Give Nova Scotians the facts: Gaming will be conducted in an open, transparent, and accountable manner, and Nova Scotians will be kept informed about the province's success in meeting established outcomes and objectives.

Outcome Measures

In addition to having a gaming strategy for the province, there needs to be defined outcomes to measure the strategy's success. The following list outlines the outcomes for improving the landscape of gaming in the province over the next five years:

- Continue to have the lowest prevalence of problem gambling in Canada
- Reduce the prevalence of problem gambling in Nova Scotia
- Increase the percentage of Nova Scotians who believe that gaming is effectively regulated
- Reduce VLT revenue as a percentage of total gaming revenue
- Reduce the percentage of VLT revenue from problem gamblers
- Maintain or reduce gaming revenue as a percentage of total provincial revenue
- Increase revenue to the charitable sector
- Increase the percentage of Nova Scotians who know where gaming revenue goes
- Increase the number of Nova Scotians who agree that they are informed or well-informed about the level of gaming occurring in the province and the social and economic impacts of that level of gaming

Nova Scotia will report on progress toward these outcomes on a regular basis, monitoring and making the necessary adjustments as the strategy moves forward.

How the Vision Will be Achieved - A Five-Year Plan

Change does not happen overnight. There is no quick fix. Change happens through decisive action, taken after careful consideration and thoughtful planning. To move toward the vision, we will:

Address problem gambling more effectively

- **Increase problem gambling treatment resources** based on demonstrated needs of District Health Authorities (DHA), conducting an assessment by September 30, 2005 and developing and implementing increased funding levels by December 31, 2005

- **Develop an early identification/ intervention program** by February 1, 2006 and implement it by March 31, 2006

- **Develop a comprehensive treatment demonstration research project** by October 31, 2005, with implementation effective March 1, 2006, and follow-up evaluation and assessment by March 1, 2007

- **Establish a comprehensive problem gambling strategy** by March 31, 2006

- **Work with First Nations to develop and implement strategies to address problem gambling and addictions in Mi'kmaq communities**

- **Develop and implement a financial counselling services program** by September 30, 2006 to assist problem gamblers in getting access to the financial advice they need

- **Open an on-site resource centre at the casinos** by September 30, 2006 to ensure that responsible gaming and problem gambling information, resources, and tools are available to casino players

Encourage healthy behaviours and choices

- **Continue to implement and enhance responsible gaming programs and tools** on an annual basis to assist players in making the choices that are right for them and to ensure that responsible gaming awareness is a year-round focus

- **Launch a public awareness program** based on social marketing principles by June 30, 2005

- **Develop targeted education programs (youth, seniors)** by September 30, 2005, with implementation by June 1, 2006

- **Develop a community-based prevention program** by August 31, 2005 and implement it by December 31, 2005

- **Commission a socio-economic study** by February 28, 2006 to assess and understand the social costs and economic benefits of gaming to Nova Scotia

- **Pilot card-based player management tools at the casinos** by March 31, 2007 with implementation slated for March 31, 2008. This will determine if there are effective tools that can be implemented in the casino environment to assist players in managing and monitoring their play, and could involve ways to leverage the existing Player's Club Card technology for responsible gaming purposes.

- **Commission another prevalence study** by June 30, 2008, to assess the effectiveness of the strategy in lowering the prevalence of problem gambling and high-risk behaviours

Pursue the development and growth of responsible, entertaining gaming products and venues

- **Remove 1,000 VLTs** across profit retail locations to reduce availability and accessibility. Deactivation of an initial 800 machines will occur on November 1, 2005, and removal will begin. An additional 200 machines will be removed through attrition. Those at Legions and not-for-profit locations will be maintained due to their unique and valued contribution to their communities.

- **Reduce VLT hours** of operation by a minimum of two hours per day effective July 1, 2005, by eliminating the 12 midnight to close timeframe, during which there is a disproportionate number of problem gamblers playing VLTs

- **Remove the "Stop" button** feature on all VLTs starting January 1, 2006, because speed of play can be reduced if players can no longer stop reels from spinning during play and no player should think that a game of chance can be controlled

- **Reduce the speed of VLT games by 30 per cent,** starting January 1, 2006

- **Pilot card-based player management tools on VLTs** in select retail sites by March 31, 2006, to test technology that will allow VLT players to manage such things as setting spending limits and self-excluding from play; a decision about wider provincial implementation will be made by June 30, 2006

Use gaming to support communities

- **Develop a gaming strategy for the charitable sector** and introduce Linked Bingo by January 31, 2006 to enhance charity bingo through larger, linked jackpots, that will allow charitable organizations to continue to use bingo to fund their projects and good works

- **Continue discussions with First Nations** about restructuring gaming arrangements to implement a more socially responsible gaming model on reserves

Enhance our accountability and decision-making

- **Annually review, evaluate and report** our progress in moving toward the vision, by monitoring and measuring our performance in meeting the outcomes we have established

- **Review current law enforcement resources** to meet our objective of ensuring that only legal, controlled gaming products are available in Nova Scotia. This will be done by collaborating and consulting with the law enforcement community about the resources required.

Assessment of Banning VLTs

A significant driver of the gaming strategy was the clear dissatisfaction of Nova Scotians with the current VLT program. Accordingly, addressing Nova Scotians' concerns about VLTs was a priority in the development of this strategy and will remain a priority as this strategy is implemented and our tactics are monitored, measured, and assessed.

Some VLT opponents suggest that the solution to that dissatisfaction is simple: ban VLTs. Banning VLTs is certainly one solution but is it the right solution for Nova Scotia? This question was given careful, thoughtful consideration by reviewing the experience of jurisdictions that have banned VLTs, as well as engaging in discussions with law enforcement and problem gambling experts.

The conclusion reached is that, while removing VLTs might well reduce the prevalence of VLT problem gambling, the extent and scope of the potential impacts and implications are uncertain and may be even more unacceptable to Nova Scotians. This could include driving some people to other forms of gaming and a likely resurgence in illegal gaming.

Government does not have the luxury of implementing solutions without looking at the big picture and considering implications. Government also has a very limited ability to legislate human behaviour. There will still be some demand for VLT play, and unfortunately, there will be someone ready to exploit and meet that demand. Overall, there is a delicate balance between a restricted, legal environment and one that tips into the territory of unrestricted, illegal activity.

Enforcement can only control so much. It is important to remember that other, completely legal forms of gaming remain open and accessible to problem players. Removing VLTs does not remove the problem entirely. It is more complicated than that. Experience from other jurisdictions tells us that when a government does not offer VLTs, there is still problem gambling. As well, even where casinos and other legal forms of gaming are available, there is a significant VLT black market.

Looking at the big picture requires that tough questions be asked, leading to tough choices. What impact will banning have on problem gamblers who have a compulsion to play VLTs? Will they seek out illegal VLTs? Will they seek out other forms of gaming? Will removal of regulated, controlled legal VLTs create a market for illegal gaming and lead to the resurgence of black-market underground gaming operations? What will be the impact of illegal gaming with no level of regulation or social responsibility? What will happen when illegal machines are operating around the clock with unfair games and no restrictions? How will illegality affect how problem players access help? Can enforcement effectively deal with the movement of players to Internet gaming or other legal forms of gaming?

While a difficult decision to make, our conclusion is that, although banning is an option, it is not the only solution, and there are opportunities to effect positive change through the measures outlined in this strategy.

Government is committed to monitoring, evaluating and measuring the impacts of the changes it makes under this strategy. It will critically examine whether the initiatives it implements are achieving their objectives and moving Nova Scotia to the vision that it seeks. If these initiatives do not achieve the material change that Nova Scotians want, options will be re-assessed and banning will remain an option to be considered as this strategy moves forward.

Conclusion/Next Steps

This strategy is a significant starting point for changing the face of gaming in the province. Government is committed to seeing this strategy put into action with the necessary focus, coordination, resources, and leadership. We are also committed to constant monitoring and evaluation, making the necessary changes along the way.

We look forward to aggressively pursuing the planned initiatives targeted for 2005-2006 and to reporting on our progress at the end of the fiscal year.